

Analysis

Brazil Red Command 'Members' Arrested in Paraguay

Details

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Brazil (/brazil-organized-crime-news) **Paraguay** (/component/tags/tag/70-paraguay)

Red Command (/brazil-organized-crime-news/red-command)



Paraguay captured five alleged members of Brazilian gang Red Command (Comando Vermelho), a sign of Brazil's organized crime stretching out into the neighboring country in the wake of recent security crackdowns in Rio de Janeiro.

The Paraguayan National Anti-Drug Secretariat (Senad) arrested the Brazilian nationals on April 7 in a raid on a house in the Canindeyu department, close to the border between the two countries.

Paraguayan media source ABC reported that the property was owned by Brazilian mafia head Josimar Jesus ([http://www.abc.com.py/nota/caen-cinco-](http://www.abc.com.py/nota/caen-cinco-elementos-del-comando-vermelho/)

[elementos-del-comando-vermelho/](http://www.abc.com.py/nota/caen-cinco-elementos-del-comando-vermelho/)), alias "Bola de Fogo." The security forces seized a number of weapons, including an Uzi sub machine gun, along with body armor, ammunition, and more than 1.5 kilos of marijuana.

Four of the detainees were released within days, according to media reports

(<http://www.abc.com.py/nota/liberan-con-llamativa-celeridad-a-soldados-del-comando-vermelho/>), after the authorities judged that only one of them was responsible for the illegal items seized. The Brazilians had reportedly entered the country with the purpose of providing extra security to Jesus, who had received threats from rival gangs in the area.

The Red Command is Brazil's biggest drug trafficking group, and is in large part responsible for rolling out the cocaine trade in Rio de Janeiro in the 1980s. It developed as a self-protection group in prisons in the 1970s, and later developed into a paramilitary-style organization controlling territory in Rio's favelas.

In the last decade the group has declined from its peak in the 1990s, with security forces moving to retake control of the city's slum districts ([/news-analysis/brazil-cleans-up-police-as-well-as-slums](#)), and vigilante groups taking over much of the gang's former territory. But the Red Command remains a force to be reckoned with, and is thought to be responsible for shooting down a police helicopter over the city in October 2009.

With the raised pressures in its home city of Rio, the gang has increased its presence in neighboring Paraguay, which lacks the funds for Brazil's concerted police action. Paraguay has long been an important location for Brazil's drug gangs, both as a transit country for cocaine coming south from Bolivia and Colombia and as a producer of marijuana. According to the 2010 World Drug Report (http://www.unodc.org/documents/wdr/WDR_2010/World_Drug_Report_2010_lo-res.pdf), Paraguay is South America's top marijuana producer, with an output of some 16,500 tons in 2008.

The U.S. State Department recently dropped Paraguay (<http://www.state.gov/p/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2011/index.htm>) from list of producing and transit countries, on the grounds that its marijuana is mostly trafficked to neighboring countries such as Brazil

Senad head Miguel Chaparro

(http://infosurhoy.com/cocoon/saii/xhtml/en_GB/features/saii/features/main/2011/04/12/feature-03) said recently that 80 percent of the marijuana grown in Paraguay now ends up in Brazil. As well as drugs, Brazilian groups also import weapons through the neighboring country.

Paraguay has become an increasingly important base for the operations of Brazilian groups in the last couple of years, as the government push to retake Rio's favelas has begun to bite. Brazilian newspaper Folha de São Paulo reported in November 2010 (<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/838724-apos-acoes-no-rio-parana-e-mato-grosso-reforcam-seguranca-na-fronteira.shtml>) that Brazilian authorities were concerned that traffickers would try to escape police crackdowns in Rio by fleeing over the border into Paraguay or Bolivia. Military police in the states of Parana and Mato Grosso, which border onto Paraguay, are reportedly working to stop a "migration" of organized criminal groups into the neighboring country.

The report highlighted the Paraguayan city of Salto del Guayra as a base for the Red Command, from which they control the border states of Canindeyu, Alto Parana and Amambay.

A top Senad official told the UN in 2010

(<http://www.unodc.org/southerncone/en/imprensa/entrevistas/2010/05/21-a-corrupcao-e-uma-parte-muito-importante-dos-grupos-criminosos-diz-ministro-paraguaio.html>) that Paraguay did not have its own big homegrown organized criminal groups, but that the Red Command, along with Brazilian rival the First Command of the Capital (Primeiro Comando da Capital - PCC), had a presence in the border zone. Both these organizations have been fighting to take over the cocaine and marijuana trades from local criminal groups.

